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Edited by
BERNARD MAYO
with the advice of
A. J. Ayer P. T. Geach
R. B. Braithwaite C. A. Mace
Herbert Dingle A. M. MacIver
A. E. Duncan-Jones H. H. Price

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ANALYSIS 20 . 3 JANUARY

LOGICAL ATOMISM AND LANGUAGE

By SYDNEY SHOEMAKER

MR. PANAYOT BUTCHVAROV has contended[1] that a number of recent criticisms of Russell's philosophy of logical atomism, those directed at Russell's conception of meaning and language, represent a "peculiar misunderstanding" of Russell's views and of recent empiricism in general. It is mistakenly supposed, he says, that recent empiricists, and Russell in particular, "were concerned with the nature of language, even with the nature of ordinary language, when they talked about basic propositions, the structural similarity of propositions and facts, the referential function of names" (p. 133). According to Mr. Butchvarov it is "quite obvious" that Russell and those who shared his views "were concerned with language only as a way of studying the nature of the world and the nature of our knowledge of the world" (*ibid.*). He admits that Russell "possibly" expressed opinions concerning the nature of language itself, "such as the opinion that only words which have referents ought to be used or the opinion that the essence of language is to be found in the system of *Principia Mathematica*" (*ibid.*), but he says that Russell need not have expressed such opinions and that these opinions, if Russell did express them, were "quite accidental" to the thesis of logical atomism.

This seems to me an incredible view. To say that Russell "possibly" expressed opinions concerning the nature of language is rather like saying that Hume "possibly" expressed opinions concerning induction and causality. It may be the case that Russell was concerned with language only, or mainly, "as a way of studying the nature of the world". Mr. Butchvarov seems to think that if this is so then the correctness of his views concerning the nature of language is irrelevant to the correctness of his views concerning the nature of the world. But this is absurd. Russell's theory of language was in large part a theory about the relation of language to the world, and it is only in terms of this theory that the metaphysics of logical atomism can be expressed.

Very briefly, what Russell held in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" is that what there "really are" in the world are " simple objects " (" logical atoms ") combined together into " facts ". The simple objects include particulars, qualities and relations. It is held that simple objects must be objects of acquaintance, and it is part of Russell's theory that the only real particulars are sense-data. Now, how are we to understand such terms as " simple object " and " fact "? It is clear that in saying that the simple objects are sense-data and sense-given qualities and relations Russell is offering a theory about the nature of simple objects, not a definition of the term " simple object ". The only definition of this term that he gives is the following: " Those objects which it is impossible to symbolize otherwise than by simple symbols may be called 'simple', while those which can be symbolized by a combination of symbols may be called 'complex' "[1] A simple symbol is " a symbol whose parts are not symbols ".[2] Russell is somewhat apologetic about these definitions, and says that they are only " preliminary ", but they are the only definitions that he gives. A fact, he tells us, is " the kind of thing that makes a proposition true or false ".[3] And again, while Russell says that this definition is not exact, he offers no other. Mr. Butchvarov seems unaware that these expressions are technical philosophical terms whose meanings need to be explained. He says at one point that " atoms naturally 'compose' facts " (p. 134). But in the ordinary non-philosophical use of the word " fact " it is not at all " natural ", but quite unintelligible, to speak of a fact as being " composed " of anything at all. The notion of a fact as a complex of objects is inseparable from the correspondence theory of meaning, the complexity of facts being what corresponds in the world to the complexity of propositions. And only in terms of this theory can we explain Russell's notion of a simple object; simple objects are the meanings of the subject and predicate expressions in completely analysed propositions, and their simplicity corresponds to the unanalysability of the propositions that contain these expressions. It was because Russell held this theory that he found it impossible to characterize the nature of his metaphysical entities, e.g., the difference between facts and objects, except by referring to the way in which these entities are " expressed " in language. Simple objects, we are told, can only be expressed by simple symbols; a particular, for example, can only be named. It is of the essence of facts, on the other hand, that they cannot be named or designated by simple symbols: " a sentence (or a proposition) is the proper symbol for a fact ".[1]

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[1] "On an Alleged Mistake of Logical Atomism", ANALYSIS, 19.6, pp. 132 ff.

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[1] " The Philosophy of Logical Atomism ", in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. Robert Charles Marsh, p. 194.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Mr. Butchvarov thinks that in holding that sense-data are the only particulars Russell was simply giving expression to a neo-Humeian empiricism. But in fact this view is a consequence of views concerning the nature of language and meaning that Russell held long before his metaphysics acquired a Humeian flavour. In " On Denoting " he declared that " in every proposition that we can apprehend (i.e. not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance."[2] This is repeated in *The Problems of Philosophy* (with " understand " substituted for " apprehend "), and is called " the fundamental principle in the analysis of propositions containing descriptions ".[3] Here we have the view that meaning is essentially naming, the meaning of a name being the thing named.[4] Particulars must be objects of acquaintance because " the meaning we attach to our words must be something with which we are acquainted."[5]

According to Mr. Butchvarov the correspondence theory of meaning was not meant, or should not and need not have been meant, to apply to " ordinary language " :

> If it is interpreted as a theory of the criteria of legitimate, permissible, " significant " discourse in ordinary language, it is obviously false; for, to be legitimate or significant in ordinary language a sentence surely need not be such that its elements be in one-one correspondence with the world. . . . But surely neither Russell nor the older empiricists need have indulged in making such claims (p. 136).

This completely misses the point of the notion of *analysis* that played such an important role in Russell's philosophy. Russell did *not* hold, but emphatically denied, that every word in a significant sentence must correspond to an element in reality. He stated quite clearly that such words as " Socrates " and " Romulus " are not names in his sense, i.e., are not " logically proper names ". But having said what these words are not, he felt obliged to say what they are. What they are, he said, are " truncated descriptions ",[6] or " abbreviations for descriptions "[7]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

[2] In *Logic and Knowledge*, p. 56.

[3] *The Problems of Philosophy* (London, 1912), p. 58.

[4] In his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London, 1919) Russell says that a name is " a simple symbol, directly designating an individual *which is its meaning*, and having this meaning in its own right, independently of the meanings of all other words " (p. 174, italics mine).

[5] *Problems*, p. 56.

[6] " The Philosophy of Logical Atomism ', p. 243.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

And it was Russell's view that any sentence containing a description (an 'incomplete symbol') must, if it is meaningful, be capable of being analysed in such a way that the description does not occur in the analysed version of it. The correspondence theory of meaning was meant to apply directly only to sentences that cannot be further analysed, but it was held that any meaningful sentence must either be a sentence of this sort or be translateable into one that is.

One other remark of Mr. Butchvarov's demands comment. He says that "with Russell and the early Wittgenstein the empiricist principle began to be expressed in terms of a correspondence between *language* and sense impressions" (p. 137), and goes on to speak of the "irrelevant *linguistic* connotation" of such formulations of what is in fact but an up-to-date version of the Humeian principle that "all knowledge must be based only on direct sensory and introspective awareness" (*ibid.*). By "the early Wittgenstein" he presumably means the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. But it is a gross misinterpretation of that book to suppose that Wittgenstein was championing any "empiricist principle", or, indeed, that he was concerned with epistemological questions at all.[1] Wittgenstein regarded his doctrine of simple objects as a *logical* doctrine, one that must be true if language (ordinary or non-ordinary) is to be capable of representing the world at all, truly *or* falsely. To some extent the same was true of Russell. It is clear from the passage that I have quoted from "On Denoting" that Russell's principle (that we must be acquainted with all of the "constituents" of a proposition) was not simply Mr. Butchvarov's empiricist principle, for Russell says that this principle applies to all propositions that we can think about, and not simply to those "whose truth or falsehood we can judge of". Unlike Wittgenstein, Russell advanced a theory as to what the simple objects are, and there is no doubt that his choice of that theory was determined in part by epistemological considerations. But it was only his conception of the nature of language and meaning that made him think that any such theory was called for.

Ohio State University

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[1] See G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (London, 1959).

RUSSELL'S DENOTING COMPLEX

By RONALD JAGER

CENTRAL to the argument of Russell's famous 'On Denoting' essay is a mysterious conception, *denoting complex*, which has never been adequately understood. Recent discussions have only deepened the mystery: this paper is an attempt to dispel the mystery. Part I formulates the problem and adumbrates my answer. Part II specifies two other interpretations, contrasting them with my own. Part III tries to show why only my interpretation will do, and how the arguments for the alternatives are to be met. Part IV suggests further minor corrections in the presentations of Mr. Searle and Mr. Geach. And Part V indicates how and why Russell got us into this puzzle.

I

In his recent discussion of Russell's 'On Denoting', Mr. Searle says that the presentation

> suffers from a slipshod use of the phrase " denoting complex ". Russell introduces the phrase in a way which indicates that a denoting complex is identical with a sense [meaning], thus " denoting complex " just provides an alternative way of speaking, but he then goes on to speak as though a denoting complex *had* a sense—a view which is inconsistent with his explanation of the phrase. I adopt his original view and ignore any phrases of the argument which depend on the other use as they seem to be nonsensical. Furthermore, no such phrase can be found in Frege: either a denoting complex is a sense, in which case the phrase is superfluous, or it is not a sense, in which case it is totally unclear and apparently irrelevant to Frege's argument.[1]

What is here called " totally unclear " resulting in argument that is " nonsensical " is actually a central notion in the essay, and needs to be clarified if we are to understand how Russell got to his theory of descriptions. Searle mentions Russell's " explanation of the phrase "—unfortunately, there just is no such thing. Geach has offered some important suggestions as to what Russell meant by the term in *Principles of Mathematics* (hereafter *PoM*);[2] unfortunately, they are not quite accurate, as I shall show. And it remains unclear just how Russell conceived the denoting complex in the 'On Denoting' essay.

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[1] John R. Searle, 'Russell's Objections to Frege's Theory of Sense and Reference' ANALYSIS 18.6 (June 1958), p. 140.

[2] P. T. Geach, 'Russell on Meaning and Denoting', ANALYSIS, 19.3 (January, 1959), p. 69 ff.

Against Searle, Geach, Butler and others,[1] I shall argue that the primary use of the conception in ' On Denoting ' is this: *a denoting complex is that which denotes a meaning.* I shall call this interpretation ' Thesis 3 ', and shall try to show that this is what Russell means to mean, though he is not consistent. I shall be maintaining that Searle's view, that a denoting complex *is* a meaning (hereafter Thesis 2), cannot be right, partly because if it is, the entire conception of denoting complex becomes superfluous. But it is not superfluous, for it is just the difficulties attending denoting complexes that comprise Russell's main argument. They are special kinds of difficulties and it is they which supply Russell with his main reasons for rejecting the alleged ' Frege-Russell meaning/denotation thesis ' (hereafter F-RT).[2]

What are these difficulties? I have said that the denoting complex denotes a meaning. The trouble is, argues Russell, that it follows from the nature of meanings that no meaning can be denoted alone without the denoting dropping through the meaning to the denotation of the meaning.[3] Hence no denoting complex as such can be successfully formulated. That is the whole problem, and it shows why the conception of a denoting complex is crucial. For if we are to maintain the meaning/denotation distinction we have (Russell thinks) to be able to speak of the meaning alone; this is done (Russell decrees) via the denoting complex; and the failure of the denoting complex is the failure of the F-RT. . . . That interpretation, then, is my Thesis 3.

II

If a denoting complex is what denotes a meaning, then it is neither a denoting *phrase* (which *expresses* a meaning on the F-RT), nor a meaning, nor a denotation. There is a four-way distinction, then; and it is perhaps understandable that Russell did not succeed in keeping these ideas in separate baskets. And he did not succeed. By way of illustrating this I shall consider in turn the three possible ways in which it might be thought that denoting complexes are related to these others.

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[1] See, for example: R. J. Butler, ' The Scaffolding of Russell's Theory of Descriptions', *Philosophical Review*, 1954; J. W. Reeves, ' The Origin and Consequences of the Theory of Descriptions ', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1933; E. E. C. Jones, *Mind*, 1910. None of these either, I am afraid, really understands a denoting complex.

[2] I do not discuss in this paper Russell's relation to Frege, except indirectly; consequently, neither do I discuss the relations of *Sinn/Bedeutung*, meaning/denotation, sense/reference, etc. I discuss Russell's problem and use his terminology throughout. (And my pagination is from the reprint of ' On Denoting ' in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. Marsh). In passing, though, I should observe that Russell from the first recognized a difference between Frege's distinction and his own. His (in)famous claim in ' On Denoting ' that they " are very much the same " has had the effect of hiding from subsequent discussion the fact that in *Principles of Mathematics* (page 502) Russell discusses the difference and similarity and proposes ' indication ' as a translation of Frege's ' *Bedeutung* '—to distinguish it from his own ' denotation '.

[3] This phase of the argument has been handled very interestingly by Searle, *op. cit.* Compare my own presentation in Part II below.

Thesis 1. At first glance it seems that Russell meant to identify denoting phrase and denoting complex. (*a*) Russell lures the reader into this misconception with a treacherous footnote, on page 46, where in successive sentences he speaks of " complex denoting phrases " and " denoting complex ". (*b*) And he seems to confirm this identification of phrase and complex by employing the following sentence in one of his illustrations: " ' The centre of mass of the solar system ' is a denoting complex, not a point ".[1] For, if we put ' phrase ' for ' complex ' in that sentence nothing seems, at first glance, to have been changed at all. (*c*) Finally, Russell appears to clinch the argument for this interpretation in this way: He lays out his problem (p. 48) in these words: " When we wish to speak about the meaning of a denoting *phrase* "; and then he summarizes his discussion of this problem (p. 49) with these words: " The difficulty in speaking of the meaning of a denoting *complex* . . ." He *seems* to slide from ' phrase ' to ' complex ' without warning or compunction. These are, then, three weighty reasons, born of the text, for the view that Russell is identifying denoting complex and denoting phrase. In the face of this, it is surprising that Searle does not even consider this view, especially when a recent important paper everywhere simply *assumes* this interpretation.[2]

Thesis 2. At second glance it may seem that Russell is identifying denoting complex with meaning. This is what Searle holds. He says (see above) that Russell introduces denoting complex as an equivalent of meaning and later hedges on this. (*a*) It may well be that Russell's first use of it (" . . . it is the meanings of the constituents of a denoting complex that enter into its meaning . . .") *suggests* this equivalence of denoting complex and meaning. (*b*) Further, it is true that Russell speaks of " putting the complex in the proposition " and gives as an example " a proposition in which the subject is ' the meaning of C ' "—thereby seeming to regard complex and meaning as one.[3] (*c*) Finally, Russell later argues that on the F-RT one is driven to conclude outright that " the meaning has denotation and is a complex."[4] These are, then, three weighty reasons, born of the text, for the view that Russell is identifying denoting complex and meaning. In the face of this, it is surprising that we have to look for a third interpretation.

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[1] P. 48.

[3] P. 49.

[2] R. J. Butler, *op. cit.*

[4] *Ibid.*

Thesis 3. At third glance—a glance, incidentally, which is coincidental with the third version of this paper, the previous two having tried, impossibly, to defend Theses 1 and 2—it seems that neither of these will do and that Russell had other designs altogether.

(*a*) He takes as a basic problem that of speaking about the meaning of *C* when *C* is a denoting phrase. To do this we use '*C*', a denoting complex:

> Thus '*C*', which is what we use when we want to speak of the meaning, must be not the meaning, but something which denotes the meaning. And *C* must not be a constituent of this complex (as it is of 'the meaning of *C*'): for if *C* occurs in the complex, it will be its denotation, not its meaning, that will occur . . .[1]

It must be noted, first, that this passage touches on the nerve of Russell's argument against the F-RT; and, second, that it is '*C*' which is a denoting complex and which, as such, denotes the meaning—that which denotes the meaning is just what a denoting complex *is*. It is this conception which led Russell to his culminating objections to the F-RT:

> Thus it would seem that '*C*' and *C* are different entities, such that '*C*' denotes *C*; but this cannot be an explanation, because the relation of '*C*' to *C* remains wholly mysterious: and where are we to find the denoting complex '*C*' which is to denote *C*?[2]

(*b*) You cannot really find or formulate a denoting complex, Russell is arguing. And so his hard conclusion follows hard upon the above quotation, viz., "This is an inextricable tangle and seems to prove that the whole distinction of meaning and denotation has been wrongly conceived."[3]

(*c*) How had we fallen into the "inextricable tangle"? Russell had said that "the difficulty which confronts us is that we cannot succeed in *both* preserving the connection of meaning and denotation *and* preventing them from being one and the same."[4] Now, if a denoting complex denotes the meaning, then the meaning is the denotation of the denoting complex. As Russell sees it, meaning and denotation have thus collapsed into one another, with the result that to speak about a meaning is really to speak about a denotation. Thus, in so far as a distinction between the two is still insisted upon, we cannot be then talking about a meaning but about a denotation. So the impossibility of speaking about a meaning is a function of insisting upon a meaning/denotation distinction. Thus Russell's conclusion: " . . . the meaning must be relevant as well as the denotation. . . . Yet . . . we are compelled to hold that only the denotation can be relevant." Searle has missed this part of Russell's argument; so has Butler; so have others. It is necessarily closed to any faulty account of denoting complex.

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[1] P. 50.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] P. 49.

This is, then, a weighty threefold reason, born of the text, for the view that Russell means to equate *denoting complex* with *that which denotes a meaning*. In the face of this, it is surprising that no one has yet spelled out that and how this interpretation makes the best sense of Russell's argument.

But it does not make the argument sound. Nothing could do that. Nevertheless, only a small part of the unsoundness has been caught by Searle, and a smaller part by Butler, and none at all by others. The argument as a whole has a number of defects. Nevertheless, Russell is right that, with his conception of a denoting complex, you cannot speak about a meaning without speaking about a denotation; indeed, the meaning denoted by the denoting complex is, of course, a denotation. *In this sense* you cannot distinguish meaning and denotation. But the denotation which is identical with a meaning is not the denotation of the *meaning*, but of the *denoting complex*. Russell is right that you cannot distinguish all meanings from all denotations, for some meanings *are* denotations; but he wrongly interprets this as tantamount to a situation where some meanings are identical with their own denotations, thus destroying the distinction. It is true that some meanings are denotations; it is also true that no meanings need be their own denotations. Russell proved the former, but remained blind to the latter.

III

It remains, now, to disarm the arguments which still contend for the Theses 1 and 2. In so doing I shall be able to confirm, and further explain, my own view, Thesis 3. Let us consider in their turn the arguments given for Thesis 1, that a denoting complex is a denoting phrase. (See page 55 above.)

(*a*) Concerning this footnote on page 46, I think we may conclude either: that Russell is so concerned to spell out the meaning/denotation dichotomy that he just carelessly lets denoting phrases and complexes collapse into each other; *or* (and this is not impossible) he is here consistently holding Thesis

3; thus he would be intending by the expression "its meaning", the meaning which the denoting complex denotes. On the first alternative he is confused; on the second alternative he is at worst misleading. That is all there is to say.

(*b*) When we consider the example on page 48—" 'The centre of mass of the solar system' is a denoting complex, not a point"—it is very easy to overlook the fact that Russell offers this as an instance of *attempting to speak about the meaning of a denoting phrase*. Now his subsequent argument is that this can never be done (on the F-RT); so we know that this example, in his judgment, really does not do it either. It only *purports* to speak about the meaning of the denoting phrase. We must not, myopically, then, misread this as a statement about a phrase—as it appears, a half century later, to be. The quotes just indicate that a meaning is being spoken about; and calling the subject of the sentence a denoting complex indicates that a denoting complex is what denotes a meaning, or purports to. And if a denoting complex were indeed a denoting phrase then this example would be only about that phrase and not about the meaning at all, and thus completely pointless. Searle affirms that Russell's assumption, viz., that we even purport to denote the meaning in this way, is just false. Perhaps it is, but Russell did not think so, and I am concerned now only with what Russell thought he was doing.[1] In any case, then, the example and Russell's use of it does not support Thesis 1.

(*c*) The case for Thesis 1 now rests upon the fact that Russell in the last paragraph on page 48 speaks about "the meaning of a denoting *phrase*" and then summarizes the same problem on page 49 with the words "the meaning of a denoting *complex*". This shift from 'phrase' to 'complex' looks like a screaming confusion if my Thesis 3 is correct. So, either my Thesis 3 is not correct, or Russell is just confused, *or* we may explain the oddity as follows: in the first instance (p. 48) he intends to convey this: "the meaning *expressed by* the denoting phrase": in the second instance (p. 49) he intends to convey this: "the meaning *denoted by* a denoting complex". This interpretation does justice to his language, it is fully compatible with my Thesis 3, it makes the subsequent sentence on page 49 intelligible and relevant in a way it could not be otherwise, and it removes the last ground for identifying *complex* with *phrase*. As an interpretation it carries charity to the limit and it saves Russell from the charge of complete equivocation, though not from the charge of using highly misleading language.

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[1] The reason Russell went at it this way is to be found in *PoM.*, especially pp. 53 and 502.

Anyway, a complex could not be a phrase because Russell takes pains to argue the complex right out of existence (" there is not something other than the meaning, which can be called the complex "—pp. 49–50). It would be mad to assert that there is no such thing as a phrase.

With Thesis 1, a variant on it also departs, viz., that a denoting complex is just a complex denoting phrase. Jones made this equation long ago; but all the above considerations militate against it; plus the fact that of the many denoting phrases which Russell employs as examples, and which are in fact complex, none of them seems to be called a " denoting complex ";[1] plus the technical uses of denoting complex that I detail.

. . . So Thesis 1 no longer offers significant resistance to my Thesis 3. It remains to consider each of the aspects of Searle's Thesis 2 . . . (see page 55 above).

(*a*) Searle says that Russell introduces the denoting complex as an equivalent to sense (meaning). Russell introduces the conception in the footnote, already considered, on page 46. But clearly a denoting complex *is* not—but rather *has*—a meaning there (a denoted meaning just as on p. 49). However, Searle may have had in mind Russell's *second* use of the term ' denoting complex ', viz. the case I have considered in (*b*) above. But Searle has, I fear, overlooked the fact that, as I pointed out, Russell is there giving an example of what *purports* to be a speaking about a meaning of a denoting phrase. Consider again the example—" ' The centre of mass of the solar system ' is a denoting complex, not a point " —now you cannot, as Searle would have it, replace ' denoting complex ' with ' meaning ' for that yields only the patently false statement that ' the centre of mass of the solar system ' is a *meaning*. So putting ' meaning ' for ' denoting complex ' in the example yields a mistake for Russell which is just too far fetched to consider seriously. Russell thinks, mistakenly perhaps, that calling the subject of that sentence a complex is to purport to *speak about its meaning*, not to specify it *as* a meaning; and he thinks, rightly perhaps, that this way does not succeed. In any case, Thesis 2 receives no plausible support here.

(*b*) Then there is the expression on page 49 " . . . we put the complex in the proposition . . . " and its example: " a proposition in which the subject is ' the meaning of C' ". But Searle's view that here ' meaning ' and ' denoting complex ' are interchangeable is directly contradicted by the expression (discussed above) which precedes it: " the meaning of a denoting complex ". There is no escape, however, from the conclusion that Russell is muddled here; for none of the three Theses really justifies his usage, though Thesis 3 alone makes sense of the consequences Russell draws. What can " putting a complex in a proposition " mean in *this* context?[1] If it means " putting a *meaning* in a proposition " then Russell has inconsistently spoken *in the same sentence* of " the meaning of a denoting complex "; and if Russell is anticipating his later *conclusion* that the meaning is a complex then he is guilty of *petitio principii*. There is certainly a muddle here, but we must have more than a muddle to recommend Thesis 2.

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[1] Jones overlooked this. But see for example, pp. 41, 44, 45, 51, 52, 53–54, 55.

(*c*) Finally, Russell's assertion that " the meaning has denotation and is a complex " offers no support at all for equating ' meaning ' and ' denoting complex '. For this was, it must be remembered, a *conclusion* which Russell felt the F-RT led to. Thus to hold, with Searle, that all along a meaning was a complex (and that ' meaning ' equalled ' complex ') simply trivializes the whole story! Indeed, Russell's *conclusion* that the distinction between meaning and denoting complex cannot finally be maintained[2] is just what finally proves that on his version of the F-RT they must be assumed to be different at the outset. He could not, then, without question begging have *introduced* them as equivalents. You can prove or conclude that the Evening Star is the Morning Star, but you cannot prove or conclude that the Evening Star is the Evening Star.

IV

We must, therefore, reject the view that a denoting complex is a denoting phrase (Thesis 1), and we must also reject the view that a denoting complex is a meaning (Thesis 2). The remaining view, that a denoting complex is what denotes a meaning (Thesis 3) is, as I have shown, the principal idea behind the conception. We must also admit that there is, alas, no question but that Russell was inconsistent; the only question is, What must be accepted at face value and what must be explained or explained away? Simply to try to show how Russell assimilated ' denoting complex ', now to ' denoting phrase ', now to ' meaning ' would have the effect of obscuring the entire drive of his argument, and would undermine every explanation as to why he even introduced the denoting complex at all. But there is an explanation; and to appreciate it is to appreciate the main negative thrust of the essay.

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[1] This can be answered only by a careful scrutiny of Russell's early conception of *proposition*. Butler has pointed to *PoM* in this connection. I would also point to Russell's papers on Meinong in *Mind*, 1907.

[2] The only ground for this is that they both denote denotations.

Geach has made the attempt to appreciate it by arguing that Russell's true target was not Frege but his own denoting theory in *PoM*. But this is not quite accurate enough. Geach believes that ' denoting complex ', admittedly not in Frege, was a technicality of Russell's *PoM* theory. But it wasn't. ' Denoting complex ' does not appear in *PoM* at all! The related *PoM* term is ' denoting concept '; and this is not in Frege and it is not in ' On Denoting '. Geach has spelled out Russell's view of ' denoting *concept* ' (unfortunately calling it ' denoting *complex* ') as it appears in *PoM*. But this denoting concept of *PoM* is not the denoting complex of ' On Denoting '; this is quickly evident from a comparison of Geach's paper (on the ' concept ') with Parts II, III, and V of this paper (on the ' complex '). So I think that Geach is mistaken in his claim that Russell's objections to denoting complexes were objections to *PoM* denoting concepts which Russell had mistakenly read into Frege. At the same time, both Searle and Geach are right in the view that Russell's target cannot *simply* be Frege. But then I do not think that Russell ever thought so. For he had also simply announced, without precedent or justification, that on the F-RT both the denoting phrase and the meaning denote.[1] Searle has observed how this is not in Frege. But I am sure that Russell knew this, and that he believed that his criticism of the F-RT was just that—a criticism of a synthesis of his own *PoM* and Frege's theory. This I must yet explain.

V

If we ask what sort of ' entity ' a denoting complex is, what it is that supposedly denotes a meaning, we find little to say. The conception was introduced as a supposed necessity of the F-RT; and its nature remained finally so mysterious that Russell rejected the whole thing. It follows that we may expect that no clear conception of a denoting complex can be formulated. The denoting complex represents the attempt, and the failure, to speak about the meaning alone. Thus, as Russell presents the F-RT, there *must* be a denoting complex, and he purports to show that there *could not* be. So the F-RT collapses.

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[1] This seems, at first blush, like sheer perversity on his part, for neither he in *PoM* nor Frege had held this. It has mystified several commentators, including Searle. The explanation for this conception of a (denoting) meaning is to be found, where scholars have failed to look, on page 501 ff. of *PoM*. Briefly: Russell's *PoM* concept denoted; he says (page 502) that Frege's *Sinn* was ' roughly, though not exactly, equivalent ' to his *concept*. So he began understanding Frege's *Sinn* under the rubric of his (denoting) concept. In ' On Denoting ', no longer interested in the history of the thing, he just assumed that a meaning (which was an amalgam of his concept and Frege's *Sinn*) denoted.

Where, then, did the conception of a denoting complex come from? Not (as some say) from Frege, not (as others say) from Russell in *PoM*, not (as the *word* ' complex ' may have) from Meinong.[1] ' Denoting complex ' is simply a technical term of ' On Denoting '. Russell introduced it, without warning or explanation, as a technical term, only to drop it again. For he had brought it in as a device only to show that you cannot talk about meanings alone in distinction from denotations. Before he faces that problem, and after he leaves it, he never speaks of denoting complex at all. And thus the final difference between a denoting complex and a denoting phrase is that the former, purporting to denote a meaning, became unintelligible and vanished, while the latter, purporting to have no meaning, became a description and survived.

So there are three denoting theories that lie behind Russell's main theory of descriptions: Frege's, Russell's in *PoM*, and the one Russell criticizes in ' On Denoting ', that is, the F-RT. I do not know of any one who has really defended the latter.

I conclude, therefore, unspectacularly, that Russell's main concern in ' On Denoting ' was to present his new theory. Apparently, so eager was he to do this that he formulated, almost parenthetically, a very careless and ultimately artificial alternative theory which he rejected. Russell had not yet read Frege when he wrote the main body of *PoM*. We may guess that, when he came finally to write ' On Denoting ', his old theory, Frege's, and his reactions to Frege, must have formed a kind of blur, which, in the back of his mind, represented several kinds of approaches that he rejected in favour of definite descriptions. Out of this blue came the vague F-RT and the notion of denoting complex. As a result, we may wish to conclude that, despite Russell's conviction, ' On Denoting ' is not his " finest philosophical essay ". If we do so conclude it will perhaps be because we now know what the essay's argument was, and what it was not.

Harvard University.

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[1] See Russell's ' Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions ', *Mind*, 1907.

THE CONCEPT OF CHOOSING

By W. D. GLASGOW

PROFESSOR NOWELL-SMITH has argued[1] that, while there are other senses of the word ' choose ', the fundamental sense is doing this-rather-than-that. I shall disagree with this, although I now believe that action is a factor in choosing. For me, to choose is to decide to do (take) this-rather-than-that and the action implied in the decision may take place either simultaneously (as far as one can say) with the decision or later. To support my thesis I shall discuss the relations between (1) deliberating and choosing, (2) deciding and choosing, (3) choosing and doing.

(1) Does choosing involve deliberation? This question is at the heart of my controversy with Nowell-Smith. He argues that deliberation is not essential to choosing, apart from having a simple preference: I shall argue that it is essential, at least if one allows (as Nowell-Smith seems to) the concept of minimal deliberation.

In order to discover the ingredients of choosing, I shall take two examples, one of them not quite a case of choosing, the other a case of choosing but a marginal one. By comparing and contrasting them it ought to be possible to expose part of the logic of the concept.

(*a*) Suppose that someone (agent A) is asked to pick blindfolded a number from a box. He plunges his hand into the box and picks out the first piece of cardboard that comes to hand. This is a case of picking but not of choosing.

(*b*) Another person (agent B) might be asked to *choose* a card from a hand of cards held out to him. Nowell-Smith says of this case,[2] that when agent B takes a card this action can only be called ' choosing ' in an extended sense. His argument rests on the view (false, in my opinion) that preferment of one alternative to another is essential to choice.

Each action (the plunging of the hand into the box, the taking of the card from the box) is deliberate. A picks at random, and yet his random picking is deliberate, in that he sets himself to pick at random. Similarly B may choose at random, but his random choosing is deliberate, for he sets himself to choose at random. In this respect at least the examples are similar. Why then is one an example of picking and the other an example of choosing? The answer is that while A was probably aware that there were many pieces of cardboard in the box, he was interested only in taking out the first piece that came to hand: that is, he was not aware of the other pieces *as alternatives*. B on the other hand was aware that each card was a possibility of choice for him: he was free to take whichever he wanted. But he also saw that each card was exactly like its neighbour, and that there was therefore no reason why he should take one rather than another. He therefore made up his mind to choose at random and this he did. In other words he considered the alternatives, and " here there must surely be at least some minimal deliberation. . . . "[1] If B on being asked to choose put out his arm without looking and happened to touch a card, all we could say was that he picked a card, not that he chose one. And in the first example, if A instead of picking the first piece that came to hand, rummaged around a little and tried to sort out the pieces as alternatives, then when he took one out he could without distortion of meaning be said to have chosen. In order, therefore, for us to say that an act was an act of choosing, there must be awareness of alternatives *as alternatives*, together with a considering of these alternatives. That is, there must be at the least minimal deliberation.

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[1] ANALYSIS, 18.3 (January 1958).

[2] In an unpublished (I believe) lecture which he kindly let me read.

Nowell-Smith at one point writes: " Choosing does not always involve deliberation or even having reasons for one's choice, apart from having a simple preference." He does not mention preference again, and one is left wondering why he did not consider it more seriously. Preference, in fact, is *not* essential to choice. We have seen that it is possible to choose at random, that is, we can take one card from the hand offered, and yet have no reason for taking that particular card. If we have a preference for one card, then we have a reason for taking it. For example, one may choose jam either because one prefers it or because one prefers not to trouble one's hostess for the marmalade. One may also choose jam without preferring it or anything at all.

Not only are there choices without preference: there are also preferences (usually involving strong feelings) without choice. Let us suppose that I loathe marmalade. My hostess might say in all innocence: " Glasgow chose to eat jam to-day instead of marmalade." It looked like a choice to her, and to any spectator, but it was not a choice for me, because I never considered marmalade at all: it was not an *alternative* for me. It might be said that I *decided* to take jam, but not (once the facts are known) that I *chose* the jam.

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[1] ANALYSIS, *ibid.*, p. 64.

It is easy to see, then, that there are many occasions where greater knowledge of the situation by the spectator would lead him to use words like ' pick ' or ' take ' rather than ' choose '. But in everyday life we often interpret actions at a rather superficial level. The spectator and the agent may hold very different views of the same action.

(2) What is the relation of choosing to deciding? So far I have shown that choosing implies deliberation but not necessarily preference. Nowell-Smith admits that I may say either that I have decided which car to buy next spring or that I have chosen the car that I am going to buy next spring. He goes on: " So the decision is, as it happens, a choice. But when a decision is also a choice, it is so rather in the way that a number is (also) the solution to a problem or a man is (also) a husband."[1] This is so. In the decision I have committed[2] myself to buying a particular car. In choosing a car I have also committed myself to buying this car-rather-than-that-or-that-or-that. In other words, decision emphasizes the factor of commitment, choosing emphasizes that I have also considered alternatives. So while the decision is also a choice in *this* case, choice involves decision in *every* case, as being a husband involves being a man. This brings out the essential relationship of choice to decision. Choice must indeed involve decision, for deliberation, which we have shown to be essential to choice, if it leads to action, must have a resolution.

(3) How is choosing related to doing? Choosing seems to be logically connected with doing or taking. The dictionary gives two meanings that interest us here, and to one of these Nowell-Smith gives prominence. His fundamental sense is where to choose means to take by preference out of all that are available. This undoubtedly is an important sense, but there is the other sense where it means " to determine in favour of a course, to decide in accordance with inclinations ".[3] From my

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

[2] Commitment is for Nowell-Smith essentially social. He says that " a private unannounced decision does not commit me to anything." But when I decide to do something, then it could be said that I am prepared to do it, and that I will do it, if I can, when the time comes for me to do it. This is what I mean by commitment. Whether I tell anyone of my decision is irrelevant, although if I do announce it, it may be more difficult for me to revoke it. As Nowell-Smith saw, there are degrees of commitment.

[3] O.E.D.

analysis we can now see the connection between the two meanings. For I have argued that to choose is to decide to take this-rather-than-that. If the decision and the taking are simultaneous, then we have Nowell-Smith's fundamental sense: if they are not, we have the instances where ' choose ' and ' decide ' are very similar in meaning, although one emphasizes alternatives and the other commitments. Choice therefore involves two factors necessarily, deliberation about alternatives and a decision to act. The action may take place immediately or in the future or not at all. In those cases where the choice involves something to be done in the future it is revocable: in the so-called fundamental sense it is not revocable.

Nowell-Smith thinks that the O.E.D. supports his view that the idea of a physical taking is the " root idea " in choice. The dictionary does indeed give greater prominence to this sense than to the cold-storage sense. Possibly more people more often use the word this way? I am willing to admit that choosing and doing are logically connected, but not that the root idea in choosing is that of physical taking. The two philosophically important senses of the word are connected as follows. Common to both senses are the factors of deliberation about alternatives and decision (to action of some sort). In the cold-storage sense, where action is in the future, and where the agent is prevented from acting by some external cause or death or because he simply changed his mind, we can still say that a choice has been made. This suggests that what is fundamental to choosing are the factors common to both senses, i.e. deliberation about alternatives and decision (to action). That the standard sense (as it is sometimes called) is used to imply action here and now is interesting but philosophically misleading.

Nowell-Smith also has a more philosophical reason for insisting on his fundamental sense. " Deliberating, deciding, intending—to say nothing of advising and commanding—cluster round doing; they are intelligible only in connection with doing, if only for the obvious reason that deliberating is deliberating what to *do*, and so on." The question ' What shall I do? ' is he thinks the central one in ethics, and here he believes (rightly) that ' do ' and ' choose to do ' are synonymous. But he assumes that when someone asks ' What shall I do? ' his question can be translated into ' What shall I do, here and now? ' For him, the cold-storage sense " cannot be fundamental since the idea of deciding to do this rather than that in the future is parasitic on the idea of doing this rather than that now. We could not go window-shopping if we did not know what it was actually to buy something; and we could not choose roses from a catalogue for planting next autumn if we did not know what it was to go to the nursery and *take our pick* from among the alternatives available."[1] Now, if to window-shop is to pretend to buy, then it might be admitted that one could not go window-shopping unless one knew what it was to buy something; and in order to choose roses from a catalogue, it could be argued that one has to have had experience of choosing roses. Similarly, according to Nowell-Smith, in order to decide to buy this car rather than that in the future, it is necessary for me to know what it is to buy this car rather than that, that is, I need to have had the experience of choosing a car. So, it is concluded, the cold-storage sense is shown to be parasitic on the fundamental use. Now it may be that Nowell-Smith's argument might be useful in the theory of language learning: I cannot at the moment see its relevance to philosophy. Once we admit that choosing has to do with action, and that experience of living is required in order to understand the concepts of action, there is no need for us to go further and say that one sense of choose is more central than another. When someone asks "What shall I do?" he might be asking for advice on how to behave here and now, but it is just as likely that he might be concerned about what to do in ten minutes time, or in a month from now. Time is not relevant to the analysis of choice.

University of Sheffield.

CAN RIGHT ACTS BE VOLUNTARY?

By James K. Mish'alani

PROFESSOR RYLE seeks to elucidate the use of the terms 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' by charting their relations to other terms, such as 'responsible', 'guilty', and to such expressions as 'could not have helped', 'his fault'.[2] His contention is that "in their most ordinary employment 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' are used, with a few minor elasticities, as adjectives applying to actions which ought not to be done."[3]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[2] *Concept of Mind*, III, 3, *passim.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

His argument for this thesis is as follows. In ordinary use, we say that a certain act, *A*, is voluntary when the agent could have helped doing *A*, and that doing *A* is involuntary when the agent could not have helped doing *A*.[1] But when we say that a certain agent, *S*, could have helped doing *A*, we mean, at least in this case, that he knew *how* (or had the competence) to do what would have been proper or right but failed to exercise his knowledge and competence and did *A* instead. We imply, that is, that he was sufficiently intelligent and well-trained not to do *A*, but something else (where that something else would have been the right thing to do), if he concentrated or tried hard enough.[2] But if that is what we mean when we say " *S* could have helped doing *A* ", then it would be silly to add, " and *A* was the right thing to do ". It would be silly for two reasons. *First* (which is something that Ryle does not mention), if the statement " *S* could have helped doing *A* " is used here to mean " *S* knew how to do the right thing but did *A* instead, which was a mistake ", then to say " *S* could have helped doing *A*, and *A* was the right thing to do " would be to say " *S* knew how to do the right thing but made the mistake of doing *A*, and *A* was the right thing to do ", which is unquestionably self-contradictory; and, *second* (and this is Ryle's reason), if we say " *S* could have helped doing *A* ", when *A* is presumed to have been the right thing to do, then we will have to imply that *S* had the ' know-how ' or the competence to make a mistake but did *A* instead, which was the right thing to do. But " . . . making mistakes is not the exercise of knowledge *how*; it is a failure to exercise knowledge *how*."[3] Therefore, Ryle concludes, " in this ordinary use . . . it is absurd to discuss whether satisfactory, correct or admirable performances are voluntary or involuntary."[4] ' Voluntary ' and ' involuntary ' may apply only to what is the agent's *fault*, to what he is *guilty* of doing or having done.

Ryle's preceeding argument can be schematised as follows:

I. To say " *S* did *A* voluntarily " is to say " *S* could have helped doing *A*";

II. To say " *S* could have helped doing *A* " is to say " *S* knew how to do something other than *A* when, without external coercion, he did *A* instead ";[5]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[2] *loc. cit.*

[3] *loc. cit.*

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[5] In this expansion of " *S* could have helped doing *A* ", I made one omission from, and

III. If *S* did *A* voluntarily and *A* was the right thing to do, then it follows from I and II that *S* must have had the competence to avoid *A* and commit an error instead;

but

IV. It does not make sense to say that committing an error is the exercise of competence;

therefore,

V. It does not make sense to say of *S* that he did *A* voluntarily, when *A* is presumed to have been the right thing to do.

The statement V above, in isolation, may be misleading, for the term ' right ' that occurs in it is not sufficiently specified. Is it to be taken generically to cover all the uses of ' right ', including the moral one? Is it to exclude every use but the moral use? Is it to exclude the moral use along with other uses? Is it to exclude the moral use only?

However, V taken in the context of the four statements preceding it is *not* misleading and ambiguous, because IV imposes certain restrictions on how we are to understand ' right '. Ryle seems to be unaware of these restrictions and, consequently, seems to hold that V is generalisable to include the claim that even in moral discourse the expression " *S* did *A* voluntarily " has no use when *A* is presumed to have been the morally right thing to do. This is exactly where Ryle goes wrong.

What are the restrictions placed by IV on the use of ' right ' as it appears in V? IV would be obviously false if the term ' error ' which appears in it is taken to refer to a *moral* error, flaw, mistake or evil. For the commission of many evils requires a high degree of competence or skill. Bank-robbing requires the exercise of skills which many people spend a great deal of time in acquiring. To tell a lie successfully requires the special competence to pretend, which very few people besides well-trained actors can possess. In all these cases one can say, making perfect sense, " Jones really knows how to do evil things. His competence to tell lies is amazing; and, oh, how well he knows how to seduce married women! "

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one addition to, the expansion presented in the preceding discussion: *first*, I omit any mention of whether *A* is wrong on right, because I wish to reserve introducing the condition of the incorrectness of *A* to step IV in the argument; and, *second*, I add the condition of the absence of any power coercing *S* to do *A*, because, although Ryle does not always mention this condition, he wants to include it. (Cf. *ibid.*, p. 71). ' Coercion ' will not be analysed here; my main interest is to examine the relations between ' voluntary ', ' right ' and ' competent '.

On the other hand, IV would be obviously true if the term ' error ' in it is taken to refer to failure or to any action contributing to failure in accomplishing a task set by oneself or others. That is, if the error is a technical mistake. The skills, competences and ' know-how ' that we acquire are skills, competences and ' know-how ' *to accomplish certain tasks*. Failure to accomplish a task is not the exercise of a special skill. Of course, subverting certain tasks (while pretending to be trying to accomplish them) may require special skills, as is the case with sabotage. But subversion is not the failure to accomplish the task to be subverted; it is a task in its own right.

Now, there are certain actions which must needs be done if a particular task is to be accomplished. These actions, with respect to the specific task, are *the right things to do*. They are the prescripta of what Kant called *imperatives of skill*. Henceforth, let us refer to this sense of ' right ' by the expression ' technologically right '. And admittedly the expression " Jones has the skill to do what is technologically wrong " has no use, save a Pickwickian one, where we want to say something like " Jones is so ham-fisted that he can be relied on to make a regular mess of things ".

So, the sense of ' right ', ' wrong ', ' error ', ' mistake ', which is relevant to IV is that of technological wrongness or rightness;[1] and, consequently, Ryle cannot take his conclusion, V, to cover all the senses of ' right ', including the moral sense of it, until he has supplied certain premisses which would prove that at least in this case there are no relevant differences between the imperatives of skill and the imperatives of duty. This he fails to do.

Moreover, there are independent reasons for rejecting Ryle's implicit claim that even in moral discourse the expression " S did A voluntarily " has no use when A is presumed to have been the right thing to do. In moral discourse, appraisal-concepts are used, not only for judging actions, but also for appraising agents. And in the context of the latter activity, expressions such as " It is true that S did A, which was right, but he really could not have helped doing it " and " S did A, which was right, and, further, he could have easily helped it ", have a straightforward use. If S acts *rightly*, he would not qualify as an unquestionably *good* man unless he at least could help acting rightly; *i.e.*, unless he had the competence to act otherwise. A person who always tells the truth, simply because he is so unskilled at telling lies that he can never succeed in telling one, acts rightly; but he as an agent is much less praiseworthy a man than he who always told the truth and had, in addition, the competence to tell lies successfully. In the latter case, it is likely that the agent acts rightly because he is moral, and certainly not because he simply lacks the competence to do evil. As long as we retain this function of moral discourse (namely, that of appraising agents as good or bad, besides judging their actions as right or wrong) the distinction between morally right acts done voluntarily and right acts done involuntarily will remain of the first importance.

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[1] This can be more clearly seen if we examine the sort of examples which Ryle uses in substantiating his thesis. His most detailed example is that of a boy trying to tie a reef-knot. Here there is a task to be accomplished, and the rightness or wrongness of any move made by the boy is judged by its conduciveness to the success or failure of the task. ' Right ' and ' wrong ' are here used in their technological sense.

This does *not* invalidate all of Ryle's analysis of ' voluntary ' and ' involuntary '; for the objections I raised were directed against what Ryle *thought* were consequences of his analysis, but what I tried to show not to have been necessary consequences of his analysis.

Can the sense of ' voluntary ' and of ' involuntary ', in which morally right acts are said to be voluntary or involuntary, be analysed in Ryle's terms? Or do we have to isolate a sense of ' voluntary ' different from the one analysed by Ryle in order to make sense of an expression like " S did A, which was the right thing to do, but he could not help doing it "?

Ryle's analysis is *not in*adequate for this use of ' voluntary '. The saving point in this respect is the one I made, *contra* Ryle: namely, that the performance of morally erroneous actions may be the exercise of competence. Once this point is granted, we will be able to make perfect sense, on Ryle's grounds, of the expression " S did A voluntarily ", where A was the morally right thing for S to have done. We could expand this expression, *à la* Ryle, into " S had the competence, skill or ' know-how ' to perform B, which would have been morally wrong, but he, without coercion, did A instead, which was morally right ".[1] And this last expression, we now see, is certainly not as preposterous and as absurd as Ryle would have us think it is.

Is this use of ' voluntary ' and ' involuntary ' restricted to contexts of moral discourse only?—I think that these words have a similar use in contexts of ' technical enterprise ', or contexts of exercise of skills in general. That is so, because the exercise of one skill usually requires both the exercise of some skills besides it and the failure to exercise others. For example, I may know how to kick a tennis ball back as well as how to hit it with a tennis racket when it is thrown at me. But if I know how to play a game of tennis, I would hit the ball with the racket rather than kick it when it is thrown to me in a game of tennis. Under such circumstances, it would make good sense to say that I used the racket (which was the right thing to do) voluntarily; for it would make good sense to say that I knew how to kick the ball instead, and thus make the wrong move in the game. It would *not* make sense, however, to say that I knew how to play tennis by kicking the ball; for this would not be tennis any more.

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[1] Can we speak of somebody doing what is right with or without coercion?—Yes. Imagine a situation where one says to another, ' For once I am going to make you do what you ought to do, even if I have to hit you.'

Similarly, if somebody tried to add two figures on paper and succeeded in giving the right answer, we could say of him that he did this voluntarily only in so far as it would make sense to say that he knew how (or had the skill), e.g., to *write down* a figure other than the sum of the two first figures. But, of course, it would not make sense to say that he knew how to make mistakes in adding figures.

Briefly: An act may be a blunder with respect to the accomplishment of one task, and yet be what one ought to do if one is to accomplish another task. Further, a person may have the skills necessary for accomplishing either task; and as long as this is true, we will be able to say of a person who has acted rightly that he knew how to act otherwise.

We see now that even if we revive the Platonic theory of virtue as a skill, and thus view imperatives of duty as imperatives of skill, still it will be possible to say " S did A voluntarily ", where A is the right thing to do. For it will always be possible that S would know how to do B, where B is any action which, if done instead of A, would constitute a blunder.

Brown University.